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E.O. 12958: DECL: 1/9/2034  
TAGS: [PGOV](#) [PREL](#) [PINR](#) [PTER](#) [SOCI](#) [CH](#)  
SUBJECT: MUSLIMS IN SHANGHAI

REF: A) 08 SHANGHAI 519; B) 08 SHANGHAI 476; C) 08 SHANGHAI 580

CLASSIFIED BY: Christopher Beede, Pol/Econ Section Chief, U.S.  
Consulate, Shanghai, U.S. Department of State.  
REASON: 1.4 (b), (d)

¶1. (C) Summary: There are over 200,000 Muslims in Shanghai, according to one estimate, most of them migrants from Western China. The Muslim population in Shanghai has recently leveled off, though the number of Muslim students at Shanghai universities has increased. Muslims face no restrictions in their practice of religion, and Shanghai's seven mosques are "overflowing" on Fridays. Shanghai's top imam is undergoing religious training at Fudan University in order for the local government to "maintain control," said one scholar. Many Muslim migrants work in restaurants and are "free to make a living." Han Chinese understand little about Islam and often associate Muslim migrants with petty theft. Two Shanghai scholars do not believe Muslim extremism is a serious concern in Shanghai, but think local authorities may take measures, such as moving migrants back to Xinjiang, to ensure a smooth 2010 World Expo in Shanghai. This is one in a series of reports on Muslim communities in East China. End summary.

200,000 Muslims in Shanghai

¶2. (C) According to Wang Jianping, Professor of Islamic Studies at Shanghai Normal University, there are "at least" 200,000 Muslims in Shanghai. He calls this a "conservative estimate," explaining that it is difficult to get an accurate figure since only 60,000 are officially registered Shanghai residents (Note: Most of the officially registered Shanghai Muslims are Hui Chinese who have been in Shanghai for generations, dating back to the first major influx of Muslim traders from Nanjing shortly after the Opium War in the 1840s, according to Wang. End note.)

¶3. (C) The majority of the Muslim population in Shanghai are unregistered migrants from provinces in Western China, including Xinjiang, Gansu, and Ningxia, said Wang Jianping. Shanghai also has temporary residents from Pakistan, Iran, and other Muslim countries mostly here on business, but it is difficult to assess their exact number, added Wang. (Note: Mahmood Akhtar Mahmood, Vice Consul at the Pakistan Consulate in Shanghai, estimates there are 200 Pakistanis living in Shanghai. See Ref A. End note.) Both Wang Jianping and David Wang, Professor in the Department of Religious Studies at Fudan University, think the Muslim population in Shanghai has stabilized, and the influx of

Muslim migrants from Western China has slowed in recent years. "There are already many here (in Shanghai), and those who wanted to come have already come," said David Wang. He feels that Hui Muslims who have been in Shanghai for generations are "more liberal" than the more recently arrived Muslims from Western China, but sees no noticeable tension between the two groups.

#### Preferential Treatment for Uighur Students

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¶4. (C) Wang Jianping noted an increase in the number of Muslim university students in Shanghai in recent years. He said there are many university students from Xinjiang (about 30 Uighur students at Shanghai Normal University) and a rising number of exchange students from Turkey, Kazakhstan, Uzbekistan, Kyrgyzstan, Pakistan, Northern Africa, and Malaysia. He said many of these students study science and engineering. According to Wang, the Shanghai Government, perhaps at the behest of the Central Government, is actively trying to increase the number of Uighur students at its universities by "lowering the bar" for entry and assigning quotas to some universities. Wang speculates the Chinese Government is making an effort to better integrate Uighurs into general society. Uighur students are often given part-time jobs, living allowances, and financial aid by the universities and the Shanghai Government to cover tuition and cost of living.

#### Free to Worship

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¶5. (C) Wang Jianping thinks Muslims in Shanghai have no restrictions on the practice of their religion, and mosques are "overflowing" on Fridays. The oldest mosque in Shanghai is 700 years old, built during the Yuan Dynasty. There are currently seven mosques in Shanghai, one of which is solely for women while the other six cater to both men and women, though the

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prayer halls inside are segregated, according to Wang. The mosques are Sunni, since "99 percent of Chinese Muslims are Sunni," but Muslims of all denominations, both Chinese and foreigners, pray together in the same mosques, said Wang.

#### Government-Sponsored Training for Imams

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¶6. (C) The imams in Shanghai are originally from Shanghai, Ningxia, Henan, and Hainan, and they are appointed to their positions by the local government, said Wang Jianping. According to David Wang, the "top imam" in Shanghai is currently studying for a PhD in Islamic Studies at Shanghai's Fudan University. David Wang thinks more Muslim leaders in Shanghai are developing an interest in such religious study programs in order to become "more worldly." Wang Jianping, however, believes these Muslim leaders, like some Christian, Buddhist, and Taoist leaders, are undergoing religious training at Fudan University so that the local government, which sponsors the training, can "maintain control" over them.

#### Free to Work

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¶7. (C) According to both scholars, most Muslims in Shanghai, especially the migrants from Western China, work in restaurants or as street vendors selling barbeque meat, nuts, and trinkets. Wang Jianping estimates there are 3000-4000 Lanzhou noodle shops in Shanghai, mostly family-run with 5-6 employees, an indication of the large Muslim population in the city. Lanzhou is the capital of Gansu Province in Western China, and Lanzhou noodles are common fare for Chinese Muslims. Ge Zhuang, a leading Muslim scholar at the Shanghai Academy of Social Sciences (SASS), half-jokingly told Poloff that the best way to tell how many Muslims live in a specific neighborhood is to "see how many Lanzhou noodle shops are on each block." Unlike the recent migrants, many Muslims who have been in Shanghai for generations work in white-collar jobs and "mix in well" with the rest of the population, according to David Wang.

¶8. (C) Both scholars believe Muslims, both registered long-term residents and migrants, are "free to make a living" in Shanghai.

Employees of a Uighur restaurant in Shanghai, all recent migrants from Xinjiang, told Poloff that they experienced little difficulty settling down in Shanghai due to strong community support among Xinjiang migrants. The restaurant owner, himself a Uighur, had "invited" the employees to move from Xinjiang to work in his restaurant. They said the arrangements were all made through family connections in Xinjiang. The employees, ranging in age from early teens to early 30s, described life in Shanghai as "very comfortable," though they said they plan to eventually return to Xinjiang.

#### Little Understanding, Little Interaction

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¶9. (C) Both David Wang and Wang Jianping think there is little overt social discrimination towards Muslims in Shanghai since "Shanghai people are generally very tolerant." However, very few Han Chinese understand Muslims and their lifestyle. David Wang believes there is very little interaction between Muslim migrants and Han Chinese, and that "not many" Han convert to Islam because it entails a "complete change in lifestyle," which they do not fully comprehend. The only discrimination against Muslims that Wang Jianping observed was shortly after 9/11, when the Chinese media painted a negative picture of Muslims, and prior to and during the 2008 Beijing Summer Olympics, when some Muslims complained of searches and "mistreatment" by Shanghai police in public areas, like train stations.

#### Petty Thieves, Not Extremists

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¶10. (C) Both scholars believe there are no great security concerns about Muslim extremism in Shanghai. "Most extremist activities happen in Xinjiang," said David Wang. Wang Jianping said most Muslims in Shanghai are here "just to make a living" and have moderate views on religion. Most Shanghai residents, however, associate Muslim migrants with petty theft. A Shanghai storeowner once told Poloff that his apartment had been robbed, and though he had no evidence, he was "sure" it was perpetrated by migrants from Xinjiang who were living nearby. Many Shanghai residents also associate pickpockets with Xinjiang migrants.

¶11. (C) According to Wang Jianping, Shanghai security officials will likely remain on alert for extremist activities in the months leading up to the 2010 World Expo in Shanghai. He heard

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rumors that Shanghai authorities had paid off Uighurs migrants to return home to Xinjiang during the 2008 Olympics, and he believes similar measures may be adopted in 2010 to ensure the World Expo proceeds smoothly.

#### Other Muslim Communities in East China

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¶12. (C) There are Muslim communities in several cities throughout East China, including Shanghai, Yiwu, Kunshan, Ningbo, Hangzhou, Wenzhou, and Nanjing, several of which have mosques, said Wang Jianping. Yiwu, a commodities trading center in Zhejiang Province, has the largest population of foreign Muslims in East China, mostly from Pakistan, Iraq, Afghanistan, Iran, and Egypt (Ref B). Li Feng, a religious scholar at East China Normal University said that Yiwu's Muslims represent the best example of Chinese and foreign believers of any religion mixing together in worship and fellowship (Ref C). The other cities, like Shanghai, contain a mix of long-term Muslim residents and more recently-arrived Muslim migrants from Western China.

#### Biographic Note: Wang Jianping and David Wang

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¶13. (C) According to Wang Jianping, there are only two full-time scholars of Islamic studies in East China: himself and Ge Zhuang of SASS. Wang has been researching Islamic issues for 30 years. He first became interested in the subject when he was sent to Yunnan Province for reeducation during the Cultural Revolution in the 1970s, where he witnessed a Chinese Government orchestrated "massacre" of thousands of Muslims. Wang has

conducted research on Islamic studies in Switzerland and at the Chinese Academy of Social Sciences (CASS) in Beijing before moving to Shanghai Normal University. He will be teaching and doing research at Cornell University for a semester starting January 2009. David Wang, by his own admission, only focuses on Islamic studies "part-time." He originally began research in Christian studies but was "forced" to focus on Islam when Fudan University set up an Islamic studies program in 2000. He now does comparative research on Christianity and Islam and recently departed for the United States to be a visiting scholar at the University of California Berkeley until March 2009.

Comment

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¶14. (C) Although there appears to be little discrimination towards Muslims in Shanghai, Muslim migrants from Western China, especially Uighurs, clearly do not blend in with the rest of the population, keeping to their own tight-knit circles and many just barely able to converse in standard Mandarin. For the most part, it seems many of the recently arrived Muslim migrants are young and single, looking to earn money in Shanghai for a few years before returning to their hometowns. One young Uighur man told Poloff he plans to return to Xinjiang this year since he cannot find a "good" conservative woman to marry in Shanghai. Despite cultural and linguistic gaps, the Muslim migrants appear to be comfortable in Shanghai, perhaps because of the support network within the Muslim migrant community and mosques that allow them to maintain a little home away from home.

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